

# ALABAMA'S HEALTH

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OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## PUBLIC HEALTH EMPLOYEES' COMMITMENT AND TEAMWORK CONTINUES THROUGHOUT COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The many dedicated workers at health departments battling the virus every day have played a crucial role which has helped result in the decline of cases, hospitalizations and deaths from COVID-19 over the past 2 years. Between March of 2020 through March 2022, county health departments across the state have provided 14,106 COVID-19 testing clinics at both traditional on-site clinics and non-traditional off-site clinics. Since December 2020, county health departments across the state have held 11,849 COVID-19 vaccination clinics, and these numbers do not even include health department totals in Jefferson or Mobile counties.

Many team members have spent long, exhausting days in the summer heat and humidity, wind and rain, and winter cold and ice at testing sites as the virus surged. Others have organized and planned numerous testing and vaccination clinics, including arranging for staffing. Since at least October 2021, every county health department has offered testing and vaccinations Monday through Friday. Scheduling was sometimes difficult because employees experienced exposures themselves, became positive for the virus, and were isolated and quarantined without warning. Some needed to be absent to care for their children and other family members.

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## LAUDERDALE COUNTY COMMISSION ADOPTS RESOLUTION HONORING HEALTH DEPARTMENT

The Lauderdale County Commission adopted a resolution on February 28, 2022, recognizing individuals and organizations for their efforts during the county's COVID Vaccination Program. The Lauderdale County Health Department was among those acknowledged in the resolution along with Clinic Nurse Supervisor Camonica Graham, for providing assistance to over 3,000 citizens throughout the county.

A letter to the department stated, "As Chairman of the Lauderdale County Commission, I personally thank you for your part in this much needed service provided at many locations throughout our community. Your care and concern for the citizens of Lauderdale County made this program possible and your dedication to your area of expertise helped achieve its success." Commission Chairman Danny Pettus stated in thanking employees for their service.

# LAWRENCE COUNTY CLINIC NURSE SUPERVISOR CATHY SANDERSON HONORED AS 2021 LAWRENCE COUNTY CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

By Chelsea Retherford, Staff Writer, Moulton Advertiser

January 26, 2022

Cathy Sanderson, the clinic supervisor for Lawrence County Health Department, was named Lawrence County's 2021 Citizen of the Year at the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce annual year-end banquet January 25.

"Kind, selfless, a good neighbor, sympathetic...these words describe most of the people living in Lawrence County," Cindy Collins, one of the three who nominated Sanderson for the award, wrote to the Chamber. "To select one person as the Lawrence County Citizen of the Year, you must look beyond these traits... the person must be a leader, creative, a listener, flexible, organized, determined, committed...the person this list describes is Cathy Sanderson."

Sanderson was one of two other finalists for the award. Chamber President & CEO Craig Johnston said a panel of 18 judges voted anonymously. The first runner up was Lawrence County Commissioner Kyle Pankey, and the second runner up was Lawrence County Health Department volunteer Cindy Collins.

"It was extremely close. The recipient won by a single vote," Johnston said. "Our judges read over each nomination letter carefully, and the person selected is truly someone who makes an impact throughout the entire county."

Sanderson was nominated by Collins and Phyllis Taylor, who each volunteer at the county's health department. The Lawrence Chamber also received a nomination letter from Sanderson's husband, Scott, on her behalf.

"Cathy is an RN and has been a faithful employee of the Alabama Department of Public Health, this December will make 45 years," Scott Sanderson wrote. "She has been Clinic Manager for the Lawrence County Health Department for the



**Cathy Sanderson, R.N.**

past 30 years. Cathy's dedication to the health department over the years has given the people of Lawrence County a clinic to be proud of."

The three of Sanderson's supporters all used the word "dedication" to describe their nominee, adding that she devotes much of her free time to bettering her community.

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## Alabama Department of Public Health

### Mission

To promote, protect, and improve Alabama's health.

### Vision

Healthy People. Healthy Communities. Healthy Alabama.

### Core Values

Excellence, Integrity, Innovation, and Community.

## Alabama's Health

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**Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.**  
State Health Officer

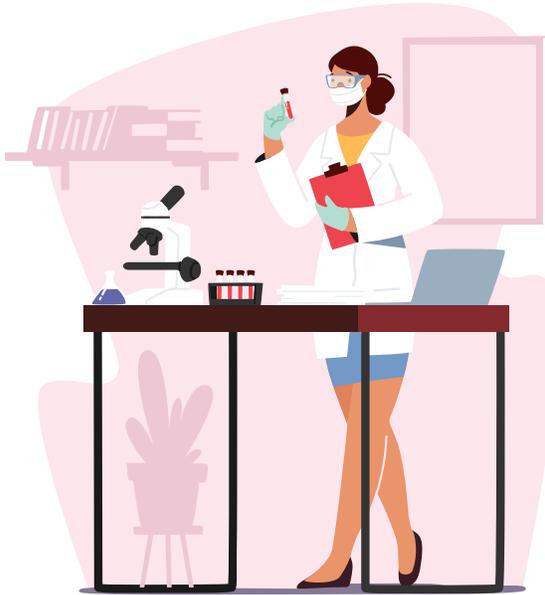
**Jamey Durham, M.B.A.**  
Director, Bureau of Prevention, Promotion, and Support

**Arrol Sheehan, M.A.**  
Editor

**Noelle Ahmann**  
Graphic Designer

## **Pandemic Response, continued from page 1**

Office staff members spent hours both day and night responding to calls from the public, hospitals and urgent cares, and the news media. Public health environmentalists willingly picked up supplies and test kits, made deliveries, and set up and took down tents at test and vaccination clinic sites. The unwavering commitment of staff, their strength, adaptability and persistence have helped meet the needs of our state during the pandemic. Efforts continued despite scattered reports of harassment, personal insults, intimidation, and even threats of harm.



Several media outlets and organizations have recognized the exceptional work done by Alabama Department of Public Health employees, and these articles are reprinted with their permission in this issue. The featured employees acknowledged that their notable accomplishments would not have been possible without the support of their teams.



Upon learning that the Lauderdale County Commission had commended the local health department for its COVID-19 vaccination program, Ricky Elliott, director of Field Operations, e-mailed, "It is so encouraging to see our staff recognized for the amazing job they do on a daily basis. The work performed over the past 2 years has been unprecedented. Staff have touched the lives of so many people. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! Job well done!"

## **Cathy Sanderson, continued from page 2**

"Mrs. Sanderson has always been diligent in meeting the demands of her career and serving the citizens of Lawrence County, but since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, Cathy has emerged to the status of hero," Collins and Taylor wrote.

Collins said the Lawrence health clinic saw a drastic increase in the number of patients it saw in a day from about 20 on average before the start of the pandemic to an average of about 200 a day.

"(Sanderson) met the crisis head-on and never flinched," she said. "Each day was a new challenge as guidelines and protocols changed daily... Cathy's organizational skills were so evident when she not only supervised her regular staff, but she added a volunteer program, which involved 50 members of the county."

Collins and Taylor said Sanderson made sure the volunteers had adequate space, equipment and training, but also successfully added the "the needs of the volunteer program" to her regular workload.

"Mrs. Sanderson always stressed to everyone involved, 'the clients come first.' Cathy made it clear that each client deserved confidentiality, respect, humility, and patience," Collins and Taylor wrote. "She is the shining example of the Golden Rule."

The two describe Sanderson as tireless and motivated when it came to addressing the needs of her community and challenges the clinic faced amid the pandemic.

"She worked nonstop, getting to work an hour early, skipping lunch when necessary and working late," Collins and Taylor wrote. "She was given a monumental task, but she met it without complaint or lack of faith that she could handle it. She went way beyond just 'handling it.'"

Sanderson's husband said that her dedication to the clinic extended beyond her work hours even before the pandemic.

"During unique situations such as ice storms, tornadoes, and COVID, Cathy has always put the health of the department first, spending hours at home and at the clinic before and after hours to do what's necessary for the good of the clinic and the citizens of Lawrence County," he said.

Scott Sanderson argues that Lawrence County's Health Department is among the best in the state thanks to his wife's efforts as well as those she works alongside.

"For years, the Lawrence County Health Department has provided, and continues to provide important community services," he wrote. "For this reason, I feel Cathy Sanderson, the staff and volunteers of Lawrence County Health Department are deserving of Citizen of the Year."

As 2021 Citizen of the Year, Cathy Sanderson will be asked to serve as grand marshal for the 2022 Moulton Christmas Parade in December.

# ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA CHAPTER RECOGNITION OF EXCELLENCE AWARD GIVEN TO ADPH

During the 114th Founders Day observance of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. on February 5, the Beta Nu Omega Chapter honored the Alabama Department of Public Health with a Recognition of Excellence certificate. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. is the first intercollegiate historically African American sorority with a global membership of 300,000 members. The presentation was made for "dedicated, unwavering commitment and contributions to the State of Alabama, in the ongoing fight against COVID-19," and the certificate stated, "We appreciate your tireless efforts while Exemplifying Excellence Through Sustainable Service." In presenting the recognition certificate, Dr. Choona Lang, Beta Nu Omega Vice President, expressed their membership's sincere gratitude to Dr. Harris for his leadership during this unprecedented time. Dr. Harris and the many employees at

the department deserves this recognition and more for the known and unknown stressors this pandemic has created.

In accepting the honor, Dr. Harris said it was his pleasure to accept this award on behalf of the men and women who work at the department.

"It's been a really difficult couple of years for everyone in this country, and particularly for those who work in public health," he said. "The epidemic has disproportionately affected African Americans in our state who are already touched with so many health disparities. It has truly been a challenge, and it's due to dedication, hard work and compassion of our staff that we have been able to accomplish many things. It is an honor to be recognized by AKA with this recognition."



*Making the presentation to State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris are chapter members, left to right, Sharon Jordan, Danita Rose, Vice President Dr. Choona Lang, Claire Payne and Melissa Hammonds.*

# JUDY SMITH BECAME FACE OF STATE'S COVID RESPONSE

*Catherine Godbey, The Decatur Daily, Ala.*

February 24, 2022

With her short spiky red hair, props ranging from football helmets to oversized pills, quips, humor and frankness, Judy Smith became a fixture of north Alabama's coronavirus outreach effort.

Since the first diagnosed case of COVID in Alabama in March 2020, Smith, as the administrator of the Alabama Department of Public Health Northern District based in Decatur, has worked to educate the public about the virus, organize test centers and distribute the vaccine.

During the height of the pandemic, the 74-year-old Smith, a nurse for the past 54 ½ years, spent more than 12 hours a day at work. "I've always been a high energy person, and feel like nursing is my calling. I truly believe that if Mordecai was here, he would say, 'Perhaps you were born for a time such as this,'" Smith said, citing Esther 4:14 in the Bible.

It is a role, however, Smith never imagined as a child.

"My mom was a public health nurse. As a child, I knew I didn't want to be a nurse and definitely not a public health nurse. I saw the work my mother did and wasn't crazy about it," Smith, a resident of Cullman County, said. "Isn't it amazing that God chooses us not for what we are but for what He knows we can become."

Limited occupational options for women in the 1960s and a job opportunity in Cullman County led Smith into a public health career.

"When I was going to school, women were either teachers or nurses. I knew I wanted to have a career, so I chose nursing," Smith said. "I took my first job as a public health clinic nurse in Cullman County as a default job while I was waiting for an emergency room trauma nurse job to become available. It didn't take long before I got infected with the public health bug and never got over it."

The wide reach of public health appealed to Smith.

"Everybody is affected by public health. I saw how wonderful it was to be able to respond to the entire community and help the community for the greater good," Smith said. "This is a calling for me. I'm so infected with the love of the people and wanting to do for the community."

Considered a trailblazer, Smith attended the first nurse practitioner's school in Alabama at the University of Alabama in Birmingham.

After working in Cullman County, Smith served as the head of the Northern District's maternity and child health



programs. Twelve years ago, she landed the position of district administrator, where she oversees 12 counties consisting of Morgan, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Cullman, Winston, Lauderdale, Colbert, Franklin, Marion, Marshall and Jackson.

During the past five decades, Smith helped distribute vaccines for polio, rubella, tetanus and the whooping cough and witnessed the spread of swine flu, the Zika virus, smallpox and HIV and AIDS.

State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris highlighted Smith's experience.

"In terms of being a professional, Judy epitomizes public health. She has a heart for public health and the people we serve," Harris said. "She has such a long career and has been around

## **Judy Smith, continued from page 5**

for a lot of things. We are fortunate to have her. The experience she has is irreplaceable. She brings perspective from many past public health episodes. She's done all this before."

### **Pandemic strikes**

The latest challenge—the new coronavirus, a virus once unfamiliar to public health officials—arrived in Alabama in March 2020.

"A real trial with COVID early on is we didn't know how to respond to it," Smith said. "We knew it was a virus, was spreading fast and was serious. But we didn't have a vaccine and no real treatment. We did the best we could and encouraged people to use basic public health practices."

To get information about the coronavirus to the public, Decatur Mayor Tab Bowling held COVID updates on YouTube. Smith, a regular guest on the series, appeared on the segment 28 times. She encouraged residents to wear masks, wash their hands and social distance, advised them on how to get tested and stressed the importance of vaccinations.

In April 2020, a month after the state's first death from the coronavirus, which occurred in Jackson County, Smith's coverage area, she said, "If we just stay at it, we can take care of this. Noah survived in an ark with a bunch of animals and no tissue paper for 40 days. I think we can make it through this and come out better on the other side."

In June 2020, in the midst of youth league baseball season, Smith said, "The ballparks were covered up. I hope a lot of folks hit a lot of good grounders and a lot of good out-of-the-ballparks. From a public health standpoint, we have hit a lot of foul balls this weekend. Our role right now needs to be prevention."

In July 2020, as people headed to the beaches, Smith said, "One thing I hear about is my tan. I have not been to the beach. It comes out of a bottle. You can buy it at one of the big box stores. It is in short supply because I do have to buy a good bit of it. If you go to get it, please wear a mask."

In August 2020, Smith appealed to the state's love of college football. "When Nick Saban is running a football game, when things were tough the first two quarters, but got better in the third and fourth quarters, that's not when he goes back and puts in the third string. That's when he says, 'Guys, we're getting there, let's push harder. Let's do what we need to do.'"

In December 2020, as the vaccine's arrival neared, Smith said, "I feel like Paul Revere. The vaccine is coming. The vaccine is coming. Paul Revere was credited with warning us about the enemy. I hope I'm warning us about the allies."

In March 2021, as the number of people hospitalized for COVID lessened, Smith said, "We're not there yet. I will tell you like I tell my children when we begin to pull up to Disney World or wherever, 'You don't jump out of the car while it's still moving.'"

At every appearance, Smith tried different tactics to reach the public.

"You try something and, if it doesn't work, you go in a different direction. You know you're not going to get everybody. But do you give up when you've got people's lives at stake? No. You keep trying," Smith said. "The hardest part is thinking about what we could've done or could've said differently. What can the message be? How can we say it in such a way that we could really take care of people?"

Smith's warmth, humor and support allowed her to communicate with the public in a unique way, Harris said.

"Ultimately, what we are trying to do is protect people's health and safety by communicating with them and getting them to change their behavior," Harris said. "Giving people the right advice is not going to do that. But Judy has the ability to reach people on a personal level. She connects with people very well and shows how she cares about people and has their best interest at heart."

Smith credited the staff and volunteers for the public health department's response to the coronavirus.

"My staff gave up every holiday except for Christmas Day so they could meet the community's needs. We had wonderful nursing and clinical volunteers. We wouldn't have gotten through this without them. They gave up so much," Smith said.

During the first days and weeks of the distribution of the vaccine, employees arrived at work and faced a line of cars two miles long. The public health department set up three clinic areas and pulled in nurses from other specialty programs to administer the vaccines.

"We hoped that demand would continue. We knew it would wane some, but we didn't realize it would wane as much as it did," Smith said. "We had more people die in 2021 with a vaccine available than we had to die in 2020 without a vaccine. We've done a lot of good and we've vaccinated a lot of people, but it's been very heart rending that we have lost so many people just because they are fearful and resistant to the vaccine."

As of the middle of this month, 17,749 people in Alabama had died from the coronavirus during the course of the pandemic, including 467 in Morgan County, 254 in Limestone County and 145 in Lawrence County.

"We were never mad when people didn't get vaccinated, but we grieved, because one of three things is going to happen. You're either going to get very, very lucky, or you're going to get the disease, or you're going to get a serious disease and die," Smith said.

The coronavirus represents the latest challenge Smith responded to as a public health nurse. In 2001, as a volunteer with the American Red Cross, she responded to 9/11 and spent two weeks in New York City providing first aid to the first responders. She also responded to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

When you are a public health nurse, you want to take care of the world. It was an honor to be able to help in some way," Smith said. "I'm not a hero. I'm much more of a servant. I've been blessed to have a wonderful job, a wonderful career and wonderful people to work with."

# SUPPORTERS WHO WORKED TO MITIGATE COVID-19 DOMINATE LIST OF ALABAMIANS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE IN 2021

Drs. Karen Landers and Rendi Murphree were among the Alabama Media Group's list of 21 Alabamians Who Made a Difference in 2021. The series, which ran in al.com from December 6 through 31, was intended to highlight people who have made Alabama a better place to live. Portions of the articles describing their contributions are excerpted here, including the following introductory article.

In 2020, State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris, Mobile County Health Officer Dr. Bernard Eichold, and Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Mark Wilson were profiled in the list of 20 Alabamians who made a difference in 2020.

## Meet the Alabamians who made a difference in 2021

By Ivana Hrynkiw and Izzy Gould

December 5, 2021

We thought 2020 was the year we needed Alabamians to rise up, to help their fellow neighbors and the state get through. That was true, but what we didn't realize at the time was that 2021 would bring the same needs.

That's why we're bringing back our Alabamians who made a difference project, naming 21 people either from or living in Alabama who made our state a better place to live this year. We launched the effort last year as 20 Alabamians who made a difference, and we knew the same honor needed to be revived this year.

Coronavirus, politics, misinformation, social justice and more shook our world during 2021, but these people did their part and more to find the good in the world and share it with the rest of us.

Choosing just 21 people was hard. We could have gone with a much longer list; which is a great problem to have.

There is no ranking, and the people are listed in no particular order. There are doctors, athletes, businesspeople, politicians, a poet and overall leaders whose voices we heard when no one else was speaking. These people made news locally and sometimes nationally, but it's how they stood and led this year that made them stand out to us and made us thankful for their contributions to the state of Alabama.

## Alabama Department of Public Health's Dr. Karen Landers: vaccines are a weapon against COVID-19

By Leada Gore

The coronavirus pandemic has propelled healthcare workers who would typically remain behind the scenes to the forefront.



**Karen Landers, M.D., F.A.A.P.**

That's the case with Dr. Karen Landers, health officer with the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Landers, who has been with ADPH since 1982, has become a key public figure as the state battles COVID-19. Her calm demeanor and straight-forward answers have been a reassuring voice amid the changing health landscape.

Here is what she had to say about COVID, ADPH and another pandemic year:

### How did the role of ADPH change this year with the evolving COVID situation?

"My career-long interest has been in emerging infectious diseases, leading to my being involved in training in this field for a number of years. As part of Emergency Preparedness, ADPH implemented public health measures and responses, utilizing emerging science and expert guidance, to provide the best information to protect the citizens of Alabama."

### How did access to vaccinations impact this?

"Access to safe, effective, and free vaccines allowed the citizens of Alabama to have a weapon to fight this virus. As part

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## Alabamians, continued from page 7

of my role, I was able to work with our Immunization Division to provide medical guidance regarding vaccine administration and protocols.”

What’s the main thing or (things) you’d like people to know about ADPH and its role in helping people in Alabama?

“So much of the work of ADPH in promoting and protecting the health of Alabama’s citizens goes unnoticed. However, ADPH works daily and diligently to prevent diseases in our state. ADPH has been able to use extensive, previous experience to guide public health measures during this pandemic.”

### More on ADPH...

“Many diseases have largely been eradicated, through the years, due to public health measures. For example, we do not see extensive food borne outbreaks in Alabama due to preventive inspections by public health environmentalists. Vaccine-preventable diseases, such as measles, are not seen due to high rates of immunization. Communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, are under control and preventable. Ongoing surveillance systems through public health epidemiology and laboratory work help detect diseases of concern. ADPH has strong public, private partnerships with academic medical centers, medical providers, hospitals, emergency management agencies, governmental entities, and many others to be able to protect Alabama’s citizens. These are just a few examples of how public health works. This wealth of knowledge has been invaluable in ADPH response to COVID 19.”

### How Dr. Rendi Murphree became the face of Mobile County’s COVID response

Dr. Rendi Murphree with the Mobile County Department of Health has been one of the most visible faces of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By John Sharp

With COVID-19 hospitalizations and infection rates low, Dr. Rendi Murphree went to The Grounds in Mobile and attended the Greater Gulf Coast Fair.

She wore a mask as she spent time with family roaming the fairgrounds. But the moment they got together for a photo, Murphree dropped her mask. She was immediately recognized.

“‘Are you that lady from the Health Department?’ I get that more often than I would like,” said Murphree, 54, the director of the Bureau of Disease Surveillance and Environmental Services with the Mobile County Health Department. “But for the most part, it’s been extremely positive.”

Murphree has become a local celebrity. Since the pandemic began, she’s emerged as the calming and reassuring face of the Health Department’s efforts to battle the virus in coastal Alabama. Almost daily, during the height of COVID-19 outbreaks – and especially during this year’s delta variant outbreak – Murphree is behind a camera and delivering an afternoon update on case counts, hospitalizations, and other



**Rendi Murphree, Ph.D.**

COVID-related news. She answers questions from the media and the public and encourages vaccination.

It’s hard to find anyone in Alabama who has been more visible during the pandemic, at least to a local market. By the Health Department’s count, there have been 243 Facebook Live updates. Murphree has done most of them. And some of the updates are extremely successful, drawing in tens of thousands of viewers across the U.S. and overseas.

“I have tried to just be a hopefully calm and consistent voice on the data and science and the facts,” said Murphree, a trained microbiologist who retired from a lengthy career with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention before joining the Health Department a few months before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

She added, “It does seem like some people rely on us to be that consistent and fair and data-driven, science-based source of COVID information.”

The job can also be frustrating. As the delta variant overwhelmed hospitals in July and August, Murphree continued to deliver the daily updates in the face of a region where fewer than 34 percent of residents had been vaccinated (the number has since grown, to slightly under 50 percent).

“It’s so stressful to walk around in a state of worry and fear about the impact of the delta strain of COVID-19 was having on our community, particularly when vaccination can prevent the largest majority of hospitalizations and deaths,” said Murphree. “It was a sad reality for me and us in public health. We still had

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## Alabamians, continued from page 8

to keep delivering the messages and continue talking to the people on an individual level to address their concerns. It's really hard to do when you feel like you are standing in the middle of a fire that could have been prevented."

Murphree said her elevated profile has not brought about any threats, though she admits to having some "difficult conversations" and receiving hate mail.

She said she doesn't read the Facebook comments.

"I've been working in public health my whole life and when people ask me, 'Aren't you tired of trying to get people vaccinated?' I will say, 'Yes, I'm tired, but this is what public health has been doing long before people knew we were public health,'" Murphree said. "We work hard to get people to eat better, to exercise, and to lose weight and monitor their blood pressure and to try, lower their cholesterol, and prevent unwanted pregnancies. There are not short-gain campaigns. Public health is here for the long haul. We will keep doing the work because it's important for the protection of our community."

Dr. Murphree, director of the Bureau of Disease Surveillance and Environmental Services of the Mobile County Health Department, was recognized for her visibility in providing almost daily Facebook Live updates seen by tens of thousands of viewers across the U.S. and in other countries as a consistent, fair, and data-driven, science-based source of COVID information.

Others highlighted in the series include **Charles Barkley** for being outspoken in his support of the COVID-19 vaccine. It was noted that at an August rally, he signed autographs, took selfies with fans, and gave away t-shirts and food.

## WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH FEATURES TRAILBLAZER DR. KAREN LANDERS

In honor of Women's History Month, WIAT-TV, Channel 42 in Birmingham, celebrated three women physicians as trailblazers, and Dr. Karen Landers, medical director for the Northeastern and Northern districts, was among them. The segment celebrated the contributions of some of the most impactful women across Central Alabama. The report quoted a Kaiser Foundation report that 64 percent of doctors are men, but now 51.9 percent of medical school students are women. In an interview, Dr. Landers said she is glad more women are entering the profession. She said her goal from an early age was to be a physician and to make a difference in medicine, a goal she has accomplished.

Macon County School Superintendent **Jacqueline Brooks** championed efforts to get adults in her community vaccinated and posted about her 8-year-old son's COVID-19 vaccination.

**Dr. Brytney Cobia**, a physician at Grandview Medical Center in Birmingham, helped warn the public to get the vaccine by stressing the number of hospitalized people with COVID who ask for the vaccine when it's too late.

Auto dealer **Shawn Esfahani** of Loxley provided a vaccine sweepstakes for Mobile and Baldwin County residents and held a vaccine clinic at his dealership after he almost died from COVID-19 himself. The names of 10 winners were entered in a weekly drawing for \$1,000. About 2,500 vaccinated people entered the sweepstakes.

Alabama State Nurses Association President **Lindsey Harris** was a voice for the state's healthcare professionals, representing the state's 95,000 nurses who have dealt with the successive waves of COVID-19, in addition to some of the early struggles of the pandemic.

**Dr. David Kimberlin**, co-director of UAB, Children's of Alabama's Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, educated the public about COVID-19 and its threat to children.

**Drucilla Russ-Jackson** and **Dorothy Oliver** took charge of vaccination distribution and education with help from their neighbors. Shots were delivered to almost every eligible resident in rural Panola.

Montgomery pulmonologist **Dr. David Thrasher** was singled out for working on the front lines treating COVID-19 using monoclonal antibody treatment early in the pandemic when there were many unknowns, saving thousands of lives during the pandemic and helping prevent a worse crisis for Alabama hospitals. Dr. Thrasher serves on the State Committee of Public Health.

## MONTGOMERY TV STATION HONORED FOR COVID-19 VACCINE SPECIAL

WSFA-TV in Montgomery produced an award-winning special, "Fear, Facts, Future - The COVID-19 Vaccine Explained," which aired March 11, 2021. The live, hour-long town hall was held in Tuskegee, the location of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. The town hall was dedicated to discussing misconceptions about the vaccines and the science behind them. The program received an Abby Award from the Alabama Broadcasters Association which recognizes excellence in broadcasting. State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris was among those serving as a panel member.

# RETIREES

The following departmental employees have retired recently:

## NOVEMBER

**Tina Allen**

East Central Public Health District

**Sammy Flowers**

Southeastern Public Health District

**Andy Mullins**

Center for Emergency Preparedness

**Vicki Southern**

Northeastern Public Health District

## DECEMBER

**Debra Hodges**

Prevention, Promotion, and Support

**Pamela Roth**

Health Care Facilities

## JANUARY

**Davia Adams**

Northern Public Health District

**Annell Bartholet**

Southeastern Public Health District

**Janet Bradford**

Northern Public Health District

**Richard Burleson**

East Central Public Health District

**Henry Bush**

Information Technology

**Melanie Wells**

Northeastern Public Health District

**Norma Cannon**

Southwestern Public Health District

**Alisa Champion**

East Central Public Health District

**Dana Condon**

Health Care Facilities

**Mazella Davis**

Northeastern Public Health District

**Jacqueline Frost**

Northern Public Health District

**May Ghadimi**

Northern Public Health District

**Harriet Hadley**

Family Health Services

**Peggy Hagler**

Southeastern Public Health District

**Joan Hart**

Southwestern Public Health District

**Nancy Holmes**

Financial Services

**Theodore Johnson**

Health Statistics

**Myrna Kervin**

Northeastern TB

**Angelia Moore**

HIV Prevention and Care

**Paula Nix**

Northeastern Public Health District

**Valerie Patton**

HIV Prevention and Care

**Susan Pittman**

Southeastern Public Health District

**Judy Rhodes**

Northeastern Public Health District

**Kirk Robinson**

Clinical Laboratories

**Maxine Sanders**

Southwestern Public Health District

**Brenda Simmons**

Northeastern Public Health District

**James Springfield**

Southeastern Public Health District

**Danna Strickland**

HIV Prevention and Care

**Janet Sudduth**

Family Health Services

**Rebecca Taylor**

Northeastern Public Health District

**Grace Thomas, M.D.**

Family Health Services

**Oscar Williams**

Clinical Laboratories

## FEBRUARY

**Chris Caldwell**

Prevention, Promotion, and Support

**Townes Douglas**

Clinical Laboratories

**Valerie Green**

Clinical Laboratories

**Richard Hendrix**

Southeastern Public Health District

**Lessie Hodges**

Northern Public Health District

**Barbara Moazen**

Northern Public Health District

**Lisa Pezent**

Health Care Facilities

**Sara Ricaurte**

Northern TB

**Michael Simpson**

West Central Public Health District

**Kelly Singleton**

Southwestern Public Health District

## MARCH

**Twanna Brown**

Family Health Services

**Cristina Bruno**

Health Care Facilities

**Janice Drew**

West Central Public Health District

**Rita Maynard**

Center for Emergency Preparedness

**Donna Williams**

Southeastern Public Health District



Twanna Brown



Henry Bush



Dana Condon



Diane Mann



Angelia Moore

# ANNUAL FLU SHOTS PROMOTED ON FLU SHOT FRIDAY

Videographer Andre Morgan interviews Dr. Burnestine Taylor, Medical Officer for Disease Control and Prevention, on Flu Shot Friday, November 12, to encourage Alabamians to get their annual flu shot. Dr. Doyin Ogunbi, Montgomery County Medical Association President, joined in stressing the importance of flu shots.



## ORAL HEALTH COALITION FOCUSES ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Contemporary Issues in Oral Health was the topic of a special quarterly meeting of the Alabama Oral Health Coalition November 18 in Prattville. Attendees heard a presentation from Rear Admiral Tim Ricks, DMD, MPH, FICD, FACD, Assistant Surgeon General, Chief Dental Officer, U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). Ricks' presentation included overviews of the USPHS and the Indian Health Service, discussion of oral health disparities and inequities, access to dental care issues, workforce issues, and multi-directional integration of oral health and overall health. Rear Admiral Ricks is shown with Jennifer Morris and Dr. Tommy Johnson, who is holding a USPHS coin presented by the admiral.



**Valeria Patton**



**Danna Strickland**



**State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris presents a plaque to Shelia Duncan, Director of the Bureau of Home and Community Services, on December 6. She retired with 37 years of service.**

# DONALD E. WILLIAMSON, M.D., STATE HEALTH LABORATORY DEDICATED IN VIRTUAL CEREMONY

A virtual dedication ceremony was held on January 15 for the Donald E. Williamson, M.D., State Health Laboratory located on Legends Court in Prattville. The dedication was originally scheduled for April 2020, but the date had to be postponed due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Bureau of Clinical Laboratories facility is named in honor of Dr. Williamson who served the Alabama Department of Public Health for 29 years, including his tenure as state health officer from 1992 to 2015.

Following a virtual introduction by State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris, Gov. Kay Ivey and former State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson made remarks. Then photographs of the facility and a video speed-walk through the laboratory were made available electronically to the news media and public.

In marking this milestone, Dr. Harris said, "We are very pleased to dedicate this state-of-the-art laboratory. The increased capacity of this facility enhances our ability to respond and features the latest technical and mechanical systems which will increase safety and security for our employees."

Dr. Harris summarized a few of Dr. Williamson's many accomplishments that include establishing the Alabama Public Health Care Authority, which is responsible for building and maintaining public health infrastructure throughout the state, and for establishing the nation's first approved Children's Health Insurance Program which resides in public health. He said Dr. Williamson is known for his compassion, integrity and "true heart for public health."

In her virtual address, Gov. Ivey said, "As governor, I've made protecting the health and safety of the people that call Alabama home a top priority. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of our state's public health laboratories, and I'm confident this state-of-the-art facility will play a vital role in safeguarding public health for many years to come."

In voicing his gratitude for this very special recognition, Dr. Williamson noted that God has blessed him beyond measure in his personal and professional life. He expressed his deep appreciation to his family and thanked the State Committee of Public Health for giving him the unique honor of serving as state health officer, their support for him in that role, and their friendship through the years. He thanked former State Health Officer Dr. Tom Miller, Dr. Harris and the thousands of public health employees whose efforts helped the lab become a reality.

He concluded, "This completes a dream that began almost a quarter century ago. This new lab is not only a building to provide public health services, but it is a symbol of public



**Donald E. Williamson, M.D.**

health's commitment to meeting the health needs of Alabama for generations to come. This is one of the moments of my professional life that I will cherish forever."

For more than a century, Alabama's public health laboratories have provided high quality services that have played a crucial role supporting the health of Alabamians. Planning efforts for the \$30 million project began in 2013 when a feasibility study was conducted. Prime considerations included the need for improved biosafety and biosecurity to ensure continued compliance with national regulatory requirements.

The laboratory replaced a leased facility on the Auburn University Montgomery campus built in the late 1970s. The laboratory relocation took place at the end of August 2020, under the leadership of Drs. Sharon Massingale and Aretha Williams, director and assistant director of the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories, and opened August 28, 2020.

The new laboratory facility offers an open laboratory concept that allows for flexibility, although there are closed spaces for special testing such as bioterrorism, tuberculosis, newborn screening, and molecular biology laboratories. Laboratory space consists of 21,000 square feet of Biosafety Level-2 and 4,500 square feet of Biosafety Level-3 laboratories. The 12-acre site overlooks the beautiful Robert Trent Jones Golf Course.

# DEPARTMENT DEBUTS REDESIGNED WEBSITE

The department has launched a redesigned version of its website at <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/index.html>. The redesign was initiated to improve the overall look and functionality of the website, which the agency considers a valuable tool in its health outreach and education efforts.

"In thinking about the redesign, we looked at ways to not only update our website on the surface, but to really improve the experience of using it," said Jennifer Allen, director of the ADPH Digital Media Branch, which manages and maintains the ADPH website. "We tried to think of ways a redesign would truly benefit our citizens, such as making it easier to get access to COVID-19 vaccines and testing."

A major piece of the redesign is the addition of a new section called Alabama's Health, which functions as a blog/newsroom for ADPH. This section, which can be accessed

directly at <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/blog/>, features all the news releases and publications produced and distributed by ADPH, including annual reports, information on monthly health observances, messages from State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris, the department's employee newsletter, and more.

Visitors to the site are able to access a new, more robust search feature, powered by Yext. This feature makes it easier for visitors to find specific information on the hundreds of programs and services offered by ADPH.

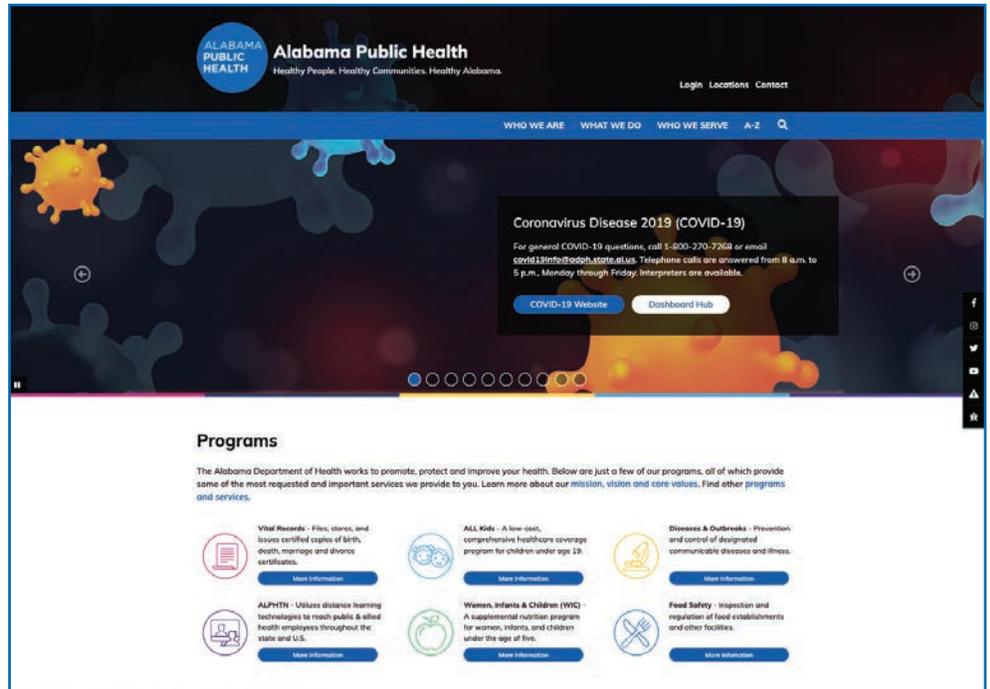
To better serve citizens seeking care in their area, ADPH has added a map showing the locations of each county health department to its Locations page, available at <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/about/locations.html>. Once there, visitors can check on a red map marker to get the address and contact information for that location; visitors can also scroll through a full list of county health departments to find information about the site nearest them.

This redesign also incorporates a couple of ways for visitors to provide feedback about the site's look and functionality. The "Report a Website Issue" form (located at <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/about/issue.html>) enables visitors to report technical issues such as links that are broken or pages that are down directly to the Digital Media Branch. There's also a Website Survey which visitors can use to provide feedback on the overall look and functionality of the site, and to make recommendations for additions and improvements.

"We're excited about this new version of our site, but there's more to come," Allen said. "There are a lot of new features we will be implementing throughout the course of the year."

ADPH's website redesign was a joint effort involving ADPH's Digital Media Branch and the Bureau of Information Technology, working in conjunction with the Hannon Hill web content management corporation.

By *BLU GILLIAND*



*Blu Gilliland and Jennifer Allen*

# ALABAMA INFANT MORTALITY RATE FOR 2020 TIES LOWEST RATE IN MORE THAN FIVE DECADES

The 2020 infant mortality rate of 7.0 deaths per 1,000 live births ties for the lowest rate in more than five decades, and the 3-year infant mortality rate (2018-2020) of 7.2 is the lowest on record. Even so, Alabama's infant mortality rate has continued to be higher than the U.S. rate, which was provisionally 5.5 in 2020.

A total of 404 Alabama infants died before reaching 1 year of age in 2020; 449 died in 2019; 405 infants died in 2018; and 435 infants died in 2017. While the 2020 rate is a 10 percent decrease from 2019, this decline is not statistically significant. The 2019 rate was 7.7, the 2018 rate was 7.0, and the 2017 rate was 7.4.

Nine Alabama counties (Bibb, Cherokee, Chilton, Choctaw, Franklin, Hale, Marengo, Wilcox and Winston) had no infant deaths in 2020, compared to seven counties in 2019.

Longstanding disparities between birth outcomes for Black and White infants persist but narrowed in 2020. Of the 404 total infant deaths, 48.5 percent (196) were attributed to the White race group, while 49.3 percent (199) belonged to the Black race group. The infant mortality rate for Black infants decreased from 12.0 in 2019 to 10.9 in 2020, and the infant mortality rate for White infants decreased from 5.6 to 5.2.

The three leading causes of infant death in 2020 remained the same as in 2019, but in a different order. The first leading cause (disorders related to short gestation and low birth weight, now elsewhere classified) and the second leading cause (congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities) were reversed. Deaths from the third leading cause, sudden infant death syndrome, increased from 24 in 2019 to 43 in 2020.

Regarding Alabama births and pregnancies in 2020:

- The number of live births decreased from 58,615 in 2019 to 57,643 in 2020. This is the lowest number of births in Alabama since the 1920s. Live births to White mothers (37,492) were the lowest seen in the state since the mid-1970s. The number of births to Hispanic mothers of all races (5,148) was the largest number of births seen in the past decade.
- Births with no prenatal care slightly increased from 2.5 percent of live births (1,478) in 2019 to 2.6 percent of live births (1,486) in 2020; 53.1 percent of births with no prenatal care were to White mothers, 55.7 percent were to mothers aged 20-29, and 74.3 percent were paid by Medicaid.
- The number of preterm births increased from 7,309 in 2019 to 7,440 in 2020, which is statistically significant.
- Although not statistically significant, the number of low weight births increased from 6,153 in 2019 to 6,228 in 2020.
- Smoking during pregnancy continues to decline among teen and adult mothers.
- The number of fetal deaths decreased from 525 in 2019 to 491 in 2020.

State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris said, "The death of any infant is tragic. Alabama must continue our commitment to prevent infant deaths by promoting evidence-based initiatives to address this persistent need."

Center for Health Statistics Director Nicole Rushing said, "We are encouraged by the decline in infant deaths seen this past year and are motivated to make sure that infant deaths in the state continue this descent."

## NEWS FROM THE JEFFERSON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

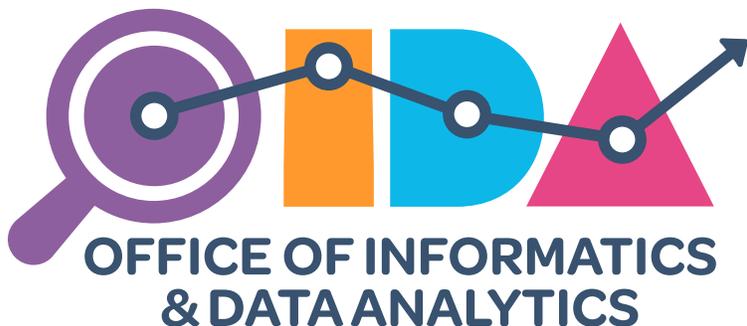
The Jefferson County Department of Health is a Phase 2 Winner of the Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau's "Promoting Pediatric Primary Prevention (P4) Challenge" to increase access to and utilization of well-child visits and/or immunizations in primary care settings.

Fifty teams received an initial award (Phase 1) of \$10,000 and 6 months to develop their proposed concept. Of them, 20 teams nationwide were chosen as Phase 2 winners and received a final \$25,000 prize. Applications were reviewed by a panel of expert judges and were evaluated based on their

approach to increasing well-child visits, increasing vaccinations, and reducing disparities among populations. Dr. Khalilah Brown, Child Health Medical Director, spearheaded this project.

Natasha Shumpert, Social Services Coordinator, and Dr. Darlene Traffanstedt, Family Planning and Population Health Medical Director, have been selected as Human Impact Partners' 2022 Health Equity Awakened Leadership Fellows. This program will take Fellows on a deep dive into personal leadership development, racial and social justice strategies for public health, and inside-outside strategies to advance health equity.

# NEW OFFICE WILL IMPROVE DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING



In June 2021, the department established the Office of Informatics and Data Analytics (OIDA) led by State Epidemiologist Dr. Sherri Davidson. OIDA, pronounced /Oy' duh, previously referred to as the Centralized Data Unit, will improve the department's data-driven decision making. The mission of the OIDA is to ensure that the determinants and distributions of disease and health for Alabama are accurately assessed and the information is disseminated in a meaningful way. OIDA will provide support and input with epidemiologic integration, analysis, interpretation, determination, visualization, and dissemination.

The department will finally have access to hospital discharge data. The Hospital Discharge Data Act passed in March 2021 and requires hospitals to report data regarding a patient's discharge (without patient identifiers), information previously inaccessible. The newly established Hospital Discharge Data Advisory Council drafted rules that went into effect on March 17, 2022. OIDA is also facilitating communications between Alabama hospitals and the department for hospitals to implement electronic case reporting for reportable conditions.

# SANTA STAYS SAFE WITH COVID VACCINATION

To make sure he is ready for his long December 24 flight, Santa Claus received his COVID-19 vaccination at the Cullman County Health Department in early December.



# CAKE WALK BENEFITS SCC

The Bureau of Prevention, Promotion, and Support hosted a cake walk November 22 with proceeds going to the State Combined Campaign. Among the organizers, shown left to right, are Denise Bertaut, DeAnnbra Peterson, Stuart Hoyle, Ann Colley and April Mullins.



# TRUST FOR AMERICA'S HEALTH REPORT RANKS ALABAMA IN TOP TIER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS

Alabama placed in the high-performance tier in comparison with other states in the Trust for America's Health 2022 report on public health preparedness, *Ready or Not 2022: Protecting the Public's Health from Diseases, Disasters, and Bioterrorism*. This report measures states' performance on 10 key emergency preparedness indicators and identifies gaps in states' readiness to respond to emergencies. The report also includes policy recommendations for strengthening the nation's health security.

Controlling the COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging in every state, the report notes. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to illustrate the critical need to invest in public health infrastructure and the social determinants of health to protect all Americans' health during emergencies. The report measures states' degree of preparedness to respond to a wide spectrum of health emergencies and to provide ongoing public health services, including disease surveillance, seasonal flu vaccination, safe water, and expanded healthcare services during emergencies.

State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris said, "Alabama's public health preparedness and response infrastructure has been crucial during the pandemic by ensuring lifesaving supplies, equipment, vaccines and medications reach the state's residents on a timely basis and on a large and unprecedented scale. These capabilities are vital in responding to a wide range of health emergencies now and in the future."

States' performance was measured during a year that presented intense demands on the nation's public health system. In addition to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 saw record heat in many places, extensive flooding, wildfires throughout the Western U.S., a highly active hurricane season, and unusual and deadly December tornados in eight states. At the same time, the report stated, hundreds of public health officials having experienced burn-out, threats to their safety, and attempts to limit their public health authorities have resigned, retired or been fired.

While critical progress was made in fighting COVID-19 during 2021, particularly through the widespread availability of vaccines and a more coordinated federal response, the pandemic continued to illuminate the ways in which health inequities put communities of color and low-income communities at heightened risk for worse health outcomes during an emergency.

"Social, economic and health inequities undermine a community's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from a public health emergency. If we enter the next public

health crisis with the same magnitude of health inequities in our communities as has been evident during this pandemic, the impact will be similar: preventable loss of life, disproportionate impact on communities of color and low-income communities, and widespread social and economic disruption. It is impossible to separate strong public health emergency preparedness and health equity," said J. Nadine Gracia, M.D., MSCE, President and CEO of Trust for America's Health.

The report tiers states and the District of Columbia into three performance levels: high, middle and low, placing 17 states and the District of Columbia in the high-performance tier, 20 states in the middle performance tier, and 13 states in the low performance tier based on their 2021 performance. Overall, 12 states improved their performance while 16 states slipped in their ranking. Alabama was among nine states that improved by one tier.

Among the report's policy recommendations were the following:

- Congress and states should provide stable, flexible, and sufficient funding for public health, including for infrastructure, data systems, and the public health workforce.
- Congress should create a COVID-19 Commission to review and address gaps in the pandemic response, and leaders at all levels of government should reject attempts to weaken public health authorities.
- Policymakers should take steps to prevent disease outbreaks by investing in vaccination infrastructure, antibiotic resistance programs, and by providing paid leave for all workers.
- Congress should create programs to help build resilient communities by investing in health equity and the social determinants of health, including anti-poverty programs and programs that build financial security for families.
- Congress should invest in the development and distribution of medical countermeasures to enable rapid development and effective deployment of life-saving products during emergencies and federal and state policymakers and healthcare systems leaders should work together to prioritize effective coordination and communication during emergencies.
- The White House, Congress and states should develop plans and provide funding to minimize the health impacts of climate change and do so in ways that address health equity.

Trust for America's Health is a nonprofit, non-partisan health policy advocacy organization which focuses on addressing the social determinants of health and correcting health inequities.

# FOUR NEW CONDITIONS ADDED TO ALABAMA NEWBORN SCREENING PANEL

Early identification and treatment of infants affected with certain genetic or metabolic conditions can prevent premature death and reduce morbidity and intellectual and other disabilities that are not typically apparent at birth. Alabama law requires screening of every newborn. The department has announced the approval of four new conditions to the Alabama newborn screening panel.

The following are the conditions added:

- Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA)
- X-linked adrenoleukodystrophy (X-ALD)
- Pompe disease
- Mucopolysaccharidosis type I (MPS-I)

The State Committee of Public Health approved a rule revision to add these conditions on December 15, 2021. Finding and treating these disorders in newborns can prevent serious complications if found early. With the additions, the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL) will now screen for 35 conditions.

Effective February 14, 2022, the BCL began testing for early indicators of SMA. SMA is a rare genetic disorder that results in changes to the genes affecting nerve cells. The lack of nerve cell protein can lead to weakness and death in children without treatment.

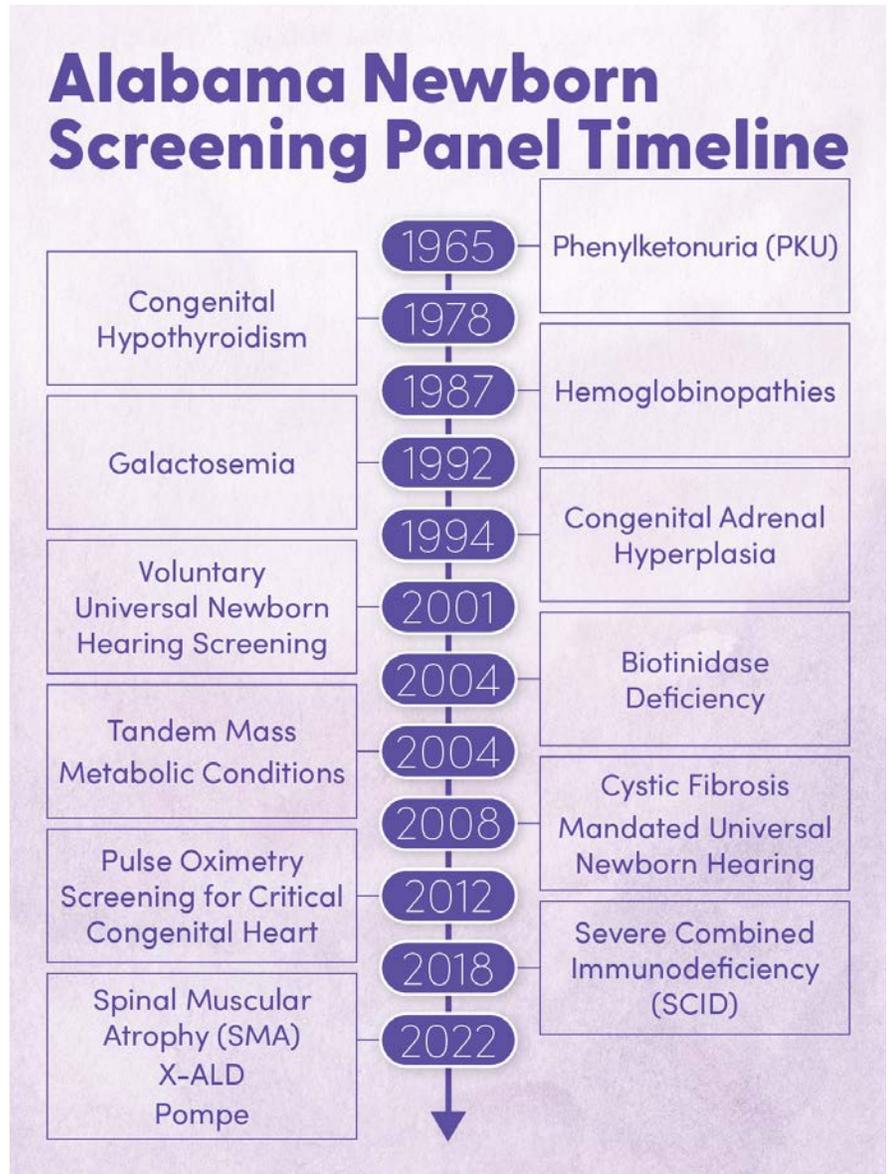
These additions were made in accordance with the national Recommended Uniform Screening Panel (RUSP). Disorders are chosen based on evidence that supports the benefit of screening, the ability of states to screen for the disorder, and the availability of effective treatments. The RUSP establishes a standardized list of disorders supported by the Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children and recommended by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The BCL anticipates testing for X-ALD, Pompe disease, and MPS-I by the end of 2022. Pompe disease and MPS-I are lysosomal storage disorders that are caused by changes in a single gene. The conditions may worsen and cause death if not treated early. Additionally, X-ALD is a rare disorder caused by a change in a single gene and can cause death during childhood without treatment.

Newborn screening can alert providers to the potential for a condition that is typically not apparent at birth. Additional evaluation and confirmatory testing are required to confirm a diagnosis and identify the right treatment.

Close coordination is needed for newborn screening follow-up. The ADPH is partnering with the University of Alabama at Birmingham to help diagnose and provide information to healthcare providers and families. Newborn screening can alert providers to the potential for a condition that is typically not apparent at birth. Additional evaluation and confirmatory testing are required to confirm a diagnosis and identify the right treatment.

The BCL is the sole provider for blood analysis of newborn screening in Alabama. The Alabama Newborn Screening Program identifies 150-200 babies each year with a metabolic, endocrine, hematological, or other congenital disorder. These babies usually look and act healthy at birth. Most affected babies have the opportunity to grow up healthy and develop normally through a simple blood screen that saves babies from death and disability.



# MOBILE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT WELCOMES ITS NEW HEALTH OFFICER

Dr. Bernard H. Eichold II established a record on May 1, 2021, when he observed his 31st year serving as Health Officer for Mobile County. No other person in Alabama has ever served as a health officer for this amount of time.

Having been selected to serve as the next Health Officer is Dr. Kevin Philip Michaels. He arrived to begin the next chapter of the Mobile County Health Department that traces its history back to 1816.

Dr. Michaels has recently served as assistant medical director at Occupational Health Center. In addition, he was the former Occupational Medicine Director at Providence Hospital. He retired as a colonel in the U.S. Army.

Dr. Michaels, who grew up in East Setauket, N.Y., earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Wofford College in Spartanburg, S.C. He remained in the southeastern United States to receive his medical degree from the University of South Alabama in 1992. He added a Master of Public Health degree from the University of Alabama's School of Public Health in Birmingham.

Dr. Michaels did his Internship at William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas. He did his Residency in Public Health at Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash. He also did a Fellowship in Occupational Medicine at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Michaels has Certifications in Preventative Medicine/ Public Health; Occupational and Environmental Medicine; Medical Review Officer; National Registry of Certified Medical



**State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris presented retiring Mobile County Health Officer Dr. Bernard Eichold a commendation on behalf of the State Committee of Public Health. Shown left to right are Carolyn Eichold, Dr. Eichold's wife; Dr. Scott Harris, State Health Officer; Dr. Kevin Michaels, Mobile County Health Officer; and Dr. Bernard Eichold. Presentations were also made by staff and the Mobile County Health Department Employee Association in the courtyard ceremony on March 4.**

Examiners; and FAA Medical Examiner. He is licensed in Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi.

He is married to Nora Michaels. They have three children: Capt. Sam Michaels, U.S. Army, married to Lucy and parents to Ella, their first granddaughter; 2nd Lt. Benjamin Michaels, U.S. Air Force, who is attending medical school; and 2nd Lt. Anna Michaels, U.S. Army.

*By J. MARK BRYANT*

## DR. BERNARD EICHOLD RECEIVES PAIR OF HONORS ON HIS RETIREMENT—MOBILE COUNTY COMMISSION AND MOBILE BRANCH NAACP

On March 14, the Mobile County Commission adopted a resolution honoring Dr. Bernard Eichold for his service, including his retirement at the rank of Captain in the U.S. Navy, science advisor and mentor to young scientists in NASA's program based at the Mobile County Health Department, senior aviation medical examiner for the Federal Aviation Administration, and numerous civic and community awards.

The Mobile Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People honored Dr. Eichold at its Founders' Day event with its selection of him as Citizen of the Year.

Robert Clopton, President of the Mobile Branch, said, "His selection was based on his devotion to the City of Mobile, its citizens and all that he did with the battle to mitigate COVID-19. He, his staff, and all of the Mobile County Health Department under his leadership were recognized for saving many lives in the Mobile area with communication, vaccination clinics and all weapons at their disposal to help the citizens of Mobile. Thus, he was recognized, and appreciation given for his efforts."

# COMMENDATIONS

If you would like to praise employees for their accomplishments, send letters of commendation to the State Health Officer or the employee's supervisor and a copy by e-mail to [Arrol.Sheehan@adph.state.al.us](mailto:Arrol.Sheehan@adph.state.al.us) for inclusion in this list. Four items are needed: the employee's name, work unit, name of the person making the commendation, and his or her city and state.

**Jasmine Abner**  
**Family Health Services**

Adolescent Pregnancy  
Prevention Branch

**Kennedi Bridgeforth**

Northern District STD Team

from Elana Parker

Merriweather

Montgomery, Ala.

**Meredith Adams**

**Jessica Durham**

**Sheila Eller**

**Laurie Gregory**

**Chris Hall**

**Bill Kennedy**

**Sandy Liepins**

**Jimmy Martin**

**Jim Messick**

**Anna Moore**

**Joe Oswalt**

**Rebekah Smay**

**Wade Williams**

and other volunteers

assisting with WIC

**Mass Mailout**

RSA Tower

Montgomery, Ala.

from Austin Atkins

Montgomery, Ala.

**Jennifer Allen**

**Blu Gilliland**

**Susan Moss**

**Brandon Vaughn**

Digital Media

from Ryan Easterling

Montgomery, Ala.

**Stephanie Askew**

**Jaida Bush**

**Lamika Davis**

**Lishea Holcomb**

**Jennifer Johnson**

**Ann Langley**

**Cecelia Law**

**Chrystal Logan**

**Keendra Martin**

**Ashia Pace**

**Burnestine Taylor, M.D.**

**Julie Till**

East Central Public

Health District

Disease Control and

Prevention

from Camelia A. Carle

Elmore, Ala.

**Cassandra Clark**

Center for Health Statistics

from Leonard Sanderson

Goshen, Ky.

Robert Taylor

Dothan, Ala.

**Kathie Cleckler**

Center for Health Statistics

from Preston Farris

Knightsville, Ind.

Shanara Qiuckle

Colorado

Timothy Ray

Address unlisted

Selena Shepherd

Luverne, Ala.

**Latoya Daniels**

**Jalesa Thompson**

East Central District

from Burnestine P. Taylor, M.D.

Montgomery, Ala.

**Brent Hatcher**

Human Resources

from Suzanne Terrell

Grove Hill, Ala.

**David Hicks, D.O.**

Jefferson County

Department of Health

from Brad Buck

Homewood, Ala.

**Sarane Datta**

**Porsha Jackson**

**Darwina Johnson**

**Jessica Jones**

Information Technology

from Jennifer Allen

Montgomery, Ala.

**Record Services Staff**

Center for Health Statistics

from Leroy and Mary Sills

Columbus, Ohio

# EVELYN JACKSON RECEIVES 50-YEAR SERVICE PIN

Evelyn Jackson began her tenure in the Central Office with the Bureau of Vital Statistics in 1972, before the Bureau became the Center for Health Statistics. To the cheers of her colleagues, State Health Officer Dr. Scott Harris presented her with a 50-year service pin on March 28. A reception in her honor followed.



# IN MEMORIAM

Niko Phillips, Health Professional Shortage Area/J-1 Visa program manager with the Office of Primary Care and Rural Health, passed away unexpectedly February 24 in Montgomery. Jamey Durham, director of the Bureau of Prevention, Promotion, and Support, wrote, "She was an incredible part of the team, and we will dearly miss her brightness and positivity. She will be dearly missed by all who knew her."



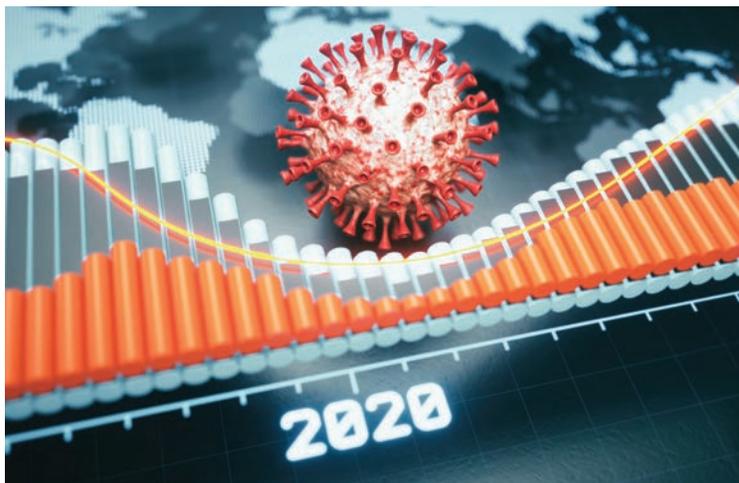
# NORTHEASTERN DISTRICT EMPLOYEES SHARE BLESSINGS

Abiding by the principle that ADPH is always in service to the community, Northeastern Public Health District managers opted to make the 2021 holiday season more meaningful. Instead of playing "Dirty Santa" games at the annual December staff meeting/holiday party, they decided to share their blessings with those less fortunate. Etowah County Home Health staff pictured, left to right, front row, are Sandy Scott, Janice Smith, Linda Ray and Angie Johnson; back row, Assistant District Administrator Mark Johnson and District Administrator Mary Gomillion.

Donations were made to purchase gifts that included bedding, bath towels, clothes, pajamas, shoes, and gift cards for groceries for a needy family. They noted, "This is what Christmas is really about....."



# 2020: A DEADLY YEAR



Disturbing key findings from National Vital Statistics System data for 2020 include the following:

- Life expectancy for the U.S. population in 2020 was 77.0 years, a decrease of 1.8 years from 2019.
- The age-adjusted death rate increased by 16.8% from 715.2 deaths per 100,000 standard population in 2019 to 835.4 in 2020.
- Age-specific death rates increased from 2019 to 2020 for each age group 15 years and over.
- Nine of the 10 leading causes of death in 2020 remained the same as in 2019, although five causes switched rank; heart disease and cancer remained the top two leading causes, and COVID-19 became the third leading cause of death in 2020.

## CALENDAR

**APRIL 13, NOON-1:30 P.M.  
(CENTRAL TIME)**

### **Improving Lung Health of Patients with Sickle Cell Disease (SCD): Alabama Perspective**

Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) is the most common life-shortening autosomal recessive disorder that predominantly affects African Americans. Alabama has one of the highest rates of SCD according to the CDC. This program will discuss the disease and the promising curative therapies which should enhance efforts to maintain lung health in this population.

**MAY 23-29**

### **Healthy and Safe Swimming Week**

This week is designated to focus educational outreach to prevent illness and injury linked to the water in which we swim, play, relax and share, and thus maximize health benefits for all. This includes preventing drowning and preventing access to water when pools are not in use.